

Ana Rocha from Nipe Fagio, part of the GAIA Africa team

“Civil society representatives, like the GAIA Africa Team, participated in the INC-1 to engage with government delegates and bring to attention agendas that matter to us and the ones that we represent. We came here as representatives of the Global South, advocating for an agreement that addresses the entire lifecycle of plastic.

Vulnerable communities have consistently played a major role in plastic waste management despite being historically neglected in waste management systems and significantly affected by plastic production. Working with waste pickers, waste cooperatives, and indigenous populations, we witness the impact of plastic in our communities. Companies with revenues higher than our GDPs produce plastic that we don't have the capacity to manage, neither should it be our responsibility, and flood our markets. These products do not make goods available to people unless they can afford them, so we face the contradiction of people drinking untreated water while their environment and waterways are filled with plastic bottles.

When it comes to a global plastic treaty, we must ensure that the means by which we end plastic pollution secure Justice as an outcome so that vulnerable communities, mostly in the Global South, don't continue to be profit enablers for companies and countries, mostly in the Global North, and have their dignity respected and valued.

UNEP must ensure that civil society representatives and waste-pickers have access to these negotiations. It is not enough to send us invitations and grant us visas to be spectators. We need access to the rooms where key decisions are made. We do not want to be faces at the back of the plenary room, we want to actively participate and contribute meaningfully to the discussions that will ensure that our planet is saved from the plastics crisis. It is time we started valuing people over profit.